

(Speech to the House of Representative Judiciary Committee in May 2009
re: House Bills #4518, 4594, 4595 and 4596)

I wish to thank all of you for the opportunity to speak on the important bills under discussion today.

The reason I became involved in the bills being discussed today is 23 years ago my son, Karl, at the age of 16, killed his father. His sentence was life without parole. That his crime was horrible and his punishment should be severe is not in question, however, I feel life without parole is not a humane answer for his punishment.

I was with Karl daily for the first 16 years of his life, he is now almost 39. I can say with absolutely certainty, Karl is not the same person who was incarcerated 23 years ago. I have watched him mature, carrying his education to a degree I never thought possible. He is constantly striving to better himself. Karl completed his high school education, has achieved satisfactory completion in many classes and programs, and consistently held a job while incarcerated. He has a friend who maintains a website with writings from Karl sharing his experiences and the learning process he is using to turn his life around. He does this in hopes of helping other troubled youth. His website is being used by at least one counselor at Eagle Village.

To be honest, I thought Karl was the only person incarcerated who had achieved so much. At the Judiciary hearing last year I found out how wrong I was. There are other youthful offenders serving life sentences who have also accomplished a great deal during their incarceration.

I am not advocating that all youthful offenders be released from prison, not all have matured sufficiently to earn this right. But, there are those who have, through their actions and accomplishments, earned the chance to reenter society and become productive members of a community. That is what these bills will do, give youthful offenders a chance of parole. These bills will not automatically release prisoners. The parole board has the final decision.

In closing, I urge you to consider the lives of these young people who have grown up in prison. Some have managed to use their time productively, becoming mature, responsible, rehabilitated people in spite of youthful errors in judgment. These people do deserve a second chance at life. It is within your power to give this chance.

Again, thank you for your time. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or wish further discussion.

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Sixteen & Life

Life Imprisonment, the Perspective of a Youth

Twenty-two years ago, when a youth of sixteen, I was arrested for taking the life of another person. This was an incredibly perilous period during my adolescence.....

What influenced my delinquent behavior?

Is forgiveness possible?

What do my reflections consist of?

Is a sentence of life without parole just?

and more.....

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NAME: Karl Strunk
PRISONER NUMBER: A-191849
DATE OF BIRTH: 24 August 1970
AGE AT TIME OF ARREST: Sixteen (16) 10 February 1987
OFFENSE: Felony Murder & Felony Firearm

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF OFFENSE: During adolescence I exercised incredibly poor judgment and took the life of my father. To compound this tragedy, he had done nothing wrong to provoke my outburst. Although there is no justification for my actions, two years prior I had been sexually assaulted (not by my father) and did not know how to cope. Humiliated and too ashamed to ask for help (in my mind, the deed had been done and there seemed little consolation in confiding in somebody, other than further disgrace), I elected to pretend that such never occurred. Eventually, I lost control of the make-believe world I was hiding in and became irrational, my father being the unfortunate victim of my immaturity. (For more depth, please visit the following link: [THE CATALYST](#)).

IMPACT OF INCARCERATION: With maturity has come the ability to communicate. In so doing I have learned to embrace those individuals who are genuine, ferreting out those who are insincere. Prison has also instilled patience and inspired me to live, as opposed to merely existing without hope and goals. With plenty of opportunity to reflect, I have concluded that a contributing error so many years ago was my failure to seek help...I should not have attempted to cope on my own. As a result, when I feel that the weight of life is becoming too heavy, relief and comfort have been found in discussing my anxieties with friends (yes, friends are possible in this environment). As for those topics in which I am uncomfortable in confiding, I find solace in journal writing. Perhaps of most importance, I have learned to consider the potential effect my actions may have on others before I make any decisions; if I have doubt, advice is sought. Lastly, my body has physically grown, in both height and girth, gray hair has temporarily found a home as balding has become nonstop, wrinkles crevice my face like canyons created by glaciers....

COUNSELING: Group Counseling; Strategic Thinking, I; Substance Abuse Counseling, I; Reintegration/Pre-Release; Substance Abuse Counseling, II; Ethical Awareness; Personal Growth & System Adjustment; Family Focus; Personal Growth & Development.

EDUCATION: Commercial Pesticide Applicator Training, Michigan Department of Agriculture; Master Gardener, Michigan State University Volunteer Program; Landscape Design Management, Vocational; Commercial Pesticide Applicator, Vocational; Machine Shop (up-grade), Vocational; Machine Shop, Vocational; Culinary Arts, Vocational; Office Worker (Business), Vocational; Montcalm Community College, Business credits; High School Diploma, Reed City High School.

FAMILY/FRIENDS: Many relationships have become incredibly stronger, though not at the outset. Understandably, some associations have waned. I am often amazed at the love, guidance, and support received from family and friends. They are my champions. My presence in their lives is not a burden or charity, but instead, I am a part of their lives because they want me. This closeness extends both ways, I want them as well.

IF GIVEN A SECOND CHANCE: I intend to follow through on the very journey I am currently traveling. After umpteen years of reflection and contemplation, regret and sorrow, it has become my ambition to reach out to troubled youth, their families, and respective communities -- if I can somehow prevent a youth from making a horrific decision which results in a victim...educating people about the perils of poor choice. If given the opportunity of a second chance I would speak publicly about my actions, experiences, and the outcome...striving to be a deterrent.